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The Panama-California Exposition, San Diego, 1915: the Olmsted Brothers' Ecological Approach to Developing a New Park Typology for the Arid West

During the last weeks of his practice, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. wrote that the future of his firm relied on developing an original landscape approach that would grapple with problems in the arid West. This paper adds new scholarship to his sons' firm, the Olmsted Brothers, and how they met those goals in Southern California. Their un-built proposal for the 1915 San Diego Panama-California Exposition, now Balboa Park, provides a paradigm of how the firm conceived landscape layouts in direct response to the site, client and social context of the period, while applying design grounded in regional aesthetics and ecological function. As landscape architects, their proposal revealed "appropriateness" in design to the ecology of Southern California, respecting the natural landscape, while seeking a unique park typology for the region. Analyzing their proposed design, research relies primarily on the Olmsted Brothers' original correspondence and previously unpublished drawings.

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